

701—7.54(17A) Ex parte communications and disqualification.

7.54(1) *Ex parte communication.* A party that has knowledge of a prohibited communication by any party or presiding officer should file a copy of the written prohibited communication or a written summary of the prohibited oral communication with the clerk of the hearings section for the department. The clerk of the hearings section for the department is to transfer the filed copy of the prohibited communication to the presiding officer.

a. Prohibited communications. Unless required for the disposition of ex parte matters specifically authorized by statute, following issuance of the notice of hearing, there shall be no communication, directly or indirectly, between the presiding officer and any party or representative of any party or any other person with a direct or indirect interest in such case in connection with any issue of fact or law in the case except upon notice and opportunity for all parties to participate. This does not prohibit persons jointly assigned such tasks from communicating with each other. Nothing in this provision is intended to preclude the presiding officer from communicating with members of the department or seeking the advice or help of persons other than those with a personal interest in, or those engaged in personally investigating as defined in this rule, prosecuting, or advocating in, either the case under consideration or a pending factually related case involving the same parties as long as those persons do not directly or indirectly communicate to the presiding officer any ex parte communications they have received of a type that the presiding officer would be prohibited from receiving or that furnish, augment, diminish, or modify the evidence in the record.

Prohibitions on ex parte communications commence with the issuance of the notice of hearing in a contested case and continue for as long as the case is pending.

b. "Ex parte" communication defined. Written, oral or other forms of communication are "ex parte" if made without notice and opportunity for all parties to participate.

c. How to avoid prohibited communications. To avoid prohibited ex parte communications, notice must be given in a manner reasonably calculated to give all parties a fair opportunity to participate. Notice of written communications shall be provided in compliance with rules in this division and may be supplemented by telephone, facsimile, electronic mail or other means of notification. Where permitted, oral communications may be initiated through conference telephone calls, including all parties or their representatives.

d. Joint presiding officers. Persons who jointly act as presiding officer in a pending contested case may communicate with each other without notice or opportunity for parties to participate.

e. Advice to presiding officer. Persons may be present in deliberations or otherwise advise the presiding officer without notice or opportunity for parties to participate as long as they are not disqualified from participating in the making of a proposed or final decision under any provision of law and they comply with the rules in this division.

f. Procedural communications. Communications with the presiding officer involving uncontested scheduling or procedural matters do not require notice or opportunity for parties to participate. Parties should notify other parties prior to initiating such contact with the presiding officer when feasible, and shall notify other parties when seeking to continue hearings or other deadlines.

g. Disclosure of prohibited communications. A presiding officer who receives a prohibited ex parte communication during the pendency of a contested case must initially determine if the effect of the communication is so prejudicial that the presiding officer should be disqualified. If the presiding officer determines that disqualification is warranted, a copy of any prohibited written communication, all written responses to the communication, a written summary stating the substance of any prohibited oral or other communication not available in written form for disclosure, all responses made, and the identity of each person from whom the presiding officer received a prohibited ex parte communication, shall be submitted for inclusion in the record under seal by protective order. If the presiding officer determines that disqualification is not warranted, such documents shall be submitted for inclusion in the record and served on all parties. Any party desiring to rebut the prohibited communication must be allowed the opportunity to do so upon written request filed within ten days after notice of the communication.

h. Disclosure by presiding officer. Promptly after being assigned to serve as presiding officer at any stage in a contested case proceeding, a presiding officer shall disclose to all parties material factual

information received through ex parte communication prior to such assignment unless the factual information has already been or shortly will be disclosed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.13(2) or through discovery. Factual information contained in an investigative report or similar document need not be separately disclosed by the presiding officer as long as such documents have been or will shortly be provided to the parties.

i. Sanction. The presiding officer may render a proposed or final decision imposing appropriate sanctions for violations of this rule, including default, a decision against the offending party, censure, suspension, or revocation of the privilege to practice before the department or the administrative hearings division. Violation of ex parte communication prohibitions by department personnel or their representatives shall be reported to the clerk of the hearings section for the department for possible sanctions including censure, suspension, dismissal, or other disciplinary action.

7.54(2) Disqualification of a presiding officer. Request for disqualification of a presiding officer must be filed in the form of a motion supported by an affidavit asserting an appropriate ground for disqualification. A substitute presiding officer may be appointed by the division of administrative hearings pursuant to 1998 Iowa Acts, chapter 1202, section 15, if the disqualified presiding officer is an administrative law judge. If the disqualified presiding officer is the director, the governor must appoint a substitute presiding officer.

a. Grounds for disqualification. A presiding officer or other person shall withdraw from participation in the making of any proposed or final decision in a contested case if that person:

- (1) Has a personal bias or prejudice concerning a party or a representative of a party;
- (2) Has personally investigated, prosecuted or advocated in connection with that case, the specific controversy underlying that case, another pending factually related contested case, or a pending factually related controversy that may culminate in a contested case involving the same parties.
- (3) Is subject to the authority, direction or discretion of any person who has personally investigated, prosecuted or advocated in connection with that contested case, the specific controversy underlying that contested case, or a pending factually related contested case or controversy involving the same parties;
- (4) Has acted as counsel to any person who is a private party to that proceeding within the past two years;
- (5) Has a personal financial interest in the outcome of the case or any other significant personal interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the case;
- (6) Has a spouse or relative within the third degree of relationship that:
 1. Is a party to the case, or an officer, director or trustee of a party;
 2. Is a lawyer in the case;
 3. Is known to have an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the case; or
 4. Is likely to be a material witness in the case; or
- (7) Has any other legally sufficient cause to withdraw from participation in the decision making in that case.

b. “Personally investigated” means taking affirmative steps to interview witnesses directly or to obtain documents or other information directly. The term “personally investigated” does not include general direction and supervision of assigned investigators, unsolicited receipt of information which is relayed to assigned investigators, review of another person’s investigative work product in the course of determining whether there is probable cause to initiate a proceeding, or exposure to factual information while performing other department functions, including fact gathering for purposes other than investigation of the matter which culminates in a contested case. Factual information relevant to the merits of a contested case received by a person who later serves as presiding officer in that case shall be disclosed if required by 1998 Iowa Acts, chapter 1202, section 19(3), and these rules.

c. Disqualification and the record. In a situation where a presiding officer or other person knows of information which might reasonably be deemed to be a basis for disqualification and decides voluntary withdrawal is unnecessary, that person shall submit the relevant information for the record by affidavit and shall provide for the record a statement of the reasons for the determination that withdrawal is unnecessary.

d. Motion asserting disqualification. If a party asserts disqualification on any appropriate ground, the party shall file a motion supported by an affidavit pursuant to 1998 Iowa Acts, chapter 1202, section 19(7). The motion must be filed as soon as practicable after the reason alleged in the motion becomes known to the party. If, during the course of the hearing, a party first becomes aware of evidence of bias or other grounds for disqualification, the party may move for disqualification but must establish the grounds by the introduction of evidence into the record.

If the presiding officer determines that disqualification is appropriate, the presiding officer or other person shall withdraw. If the presiding officer determines that withdrawal is not required, the presiding officer shall enter an order to that effect. A party asserting disqualification may seek an interlocutory appeal and seek a stay as provided under this division.